

“The Gray Wolf” by George MacDonald
-Poetic Rendering by Bryan Creech

---Lost One Stormy Night---(Poem 1)

Among the Orkney and Shetland Isles,
A young student wandered for many miles.
Lost...in a storm with wind and hail "on its wing".
One twilight eve, in the depth of spring.

His search for shelter was in vain.
Nothing around him...but..moss to remain.
Barren.....remote and surroundings obscure;
Misplaced....helpless and lost (for sure).

Still he walked, (for walking's sake);
Vainly, no progress that night to make.
Loneliness chiseled in his heart (as a glyph);
As he stood upon a desolate cliff.

The wind was howling from behind.
To descend the precipice, (he had in mind).
Hand...then...foot, as he made his way;
A discovery, that left him in utter dismay.

Each step, brought...the crackling of bones,
Against the ground of rock and stones;
With every crunching step to hear.
Soon left him standing in utter fear.

Now standing, in front of a little cave.
Nothing but this, from the elements to save.
For this storm increased in violence;
Either entering--or his life...a recompense.

The storm, with its force and voice;
Concluding... "To enter...his only choice."
With each step, the darkness had grown.
Slowly, then...finally to sit, upon a stone.

He had parted from his company.
None of his fellow travelers now to see.
Unrest...fell, this stormy night;
With no other soul, now in sight.

A lull in the storm, now, the boy to claim;
But with it, slow, steady....footsteps...came.
The slow...stride...of a stealthy beast,
With each step, his fear increased.

Mind racing...with this moment at hand,
Thinking... "No ravenous beast could inhabit this land?"
Before another moment of perplexing fear,
Now...the face...of a woman...to then appear.

---She Moved In Grace---(Poem 2)

The sight of her face, a thrill to invoke!
With eagerness, the young man spoke,
(For no other trace of humanity was found);

As she moved closer...towards the voice's sound.

Barely...faintly...her face to see.
Quickly..she moved..(so silently).
Through...the darkness of this den,
As a rush...of the wind, she entered in.

The student asked, "Fair lady, I do implore?"
"How to find my way across the Shielness moor?"
She answered...sweet..with teeth so white
"You cannot...find your way...through it, tonight"

He was bewitched by her subtle beguile;
As her teeth...shimmered...with a gleaming smile.
He replied, "Then, what shall I do?"
She answered, "My mother, has shelter to offer you."

She turned in silence and left the cave.
The young man then followed--through the nave.
He watched her...glide...across the ground
With each step, moving...(with hardly a sound).

No shoes she wore, with feet so bare.
Her feet were brown and ever fair.
"Cat-like" she moved across the stone;
As she led him further towards her mother's home

Her hair blew tangled in the wind.
She was small and lithe at every bend.
Her garments were both scanty and torn;

As she clutched tightly to the skirt that was worn.

The complexion of her face was grey,
Worn...yet delicate in display.
Smooth and graceful was her skin.
Her nostrils and eyelids tremulous, thin.

Her lips...curved...and faultless to be.
What her eyes were like? (he could not see).
Never lifting her eyelids there to raise.
Not able to look and see her gaze?

Smoke...spread...over the rocky place.
When they reached the cliff's face,
At the base of this rocky cliff to jut;
Was the sight....of a little hut.

A hut with an inner dwelling shared,
The smoke, evidence of food prepared.
She led him to the cottage door,
To see...an old woman cooking, over a fire...on the floor.

---He Looks Into Her Eyes---(Poem 3)

In the cottage, an old woman was toiling.
While on the fire, a large fish was broiling.
She welcomed the young man to this place;
With an "inviting" yet...old and wrinkled face.

She dusted off a single chair.

(The only one to be found there)
She placed it for him by the fire,
There to rest and to retire.

The daughter...only words so few,
She sat herself on a bench in view,
In an "unusual posture" did she sit;
(A strange position that did not fit).

As she rested her chin upon her hand...in surprise!
He caught first glance at the daughter's eyes,
They were...blue...and fixed upon him in greed.
(As if upon his being...to crave and to feed)

Startled and aware!..Her eyes to betray.
She dropped her gaze to soon turn away.
That moment...her face to turn and veil,
The most beautiful complexion (her face) to tell.

The fish was broiled and complete.
The old woman prepared the table to eat,
A cloth on the table where they ate;
Then...she placed the fish upon a plate.

With no other provision for this dish,
(With his knife) divided a portion from the fish;
And offered it to the mother first.
The mother, (the daughter) to then coerce.

"Come my lamb. Eat you must."

As the daughter approached...in utter disgust;
With her nostrils and mouth to quiver and shake,
Not a bite of it would the daughter partake.

She turned and hurried out of into the night.
The old woman said, "Fish has never been her delight."
The man..."Her health is poor to the eye."
The woman answered only...with a sigh

When there was no more fish to be found
The young man..heard...the strangest sound?
Outside the door, in the moment-at-hand--
Were the pattering...of dog's feet...in the sand.

---The Vexation of His Soul---(Poem 4)

Out of the window, did he peer.
And saw..it was...the young woman...drawing near.
(She looked better than before),
As she entered through the door.

She sat...at a stool, by the fire;
(Opposite of him), to retire.
But as she sat, he saw a trace,
Of blood...slowly...running...down her face.

The old lady brought a whisky jar,
And put an old kettle, by the fire;
Until the water began to boil;
Then poured the toddy in a bowl.

The young man to...utterly bewitch,
With her...every...move...and twitch;
Of her lovely eyelids and glance;
Leaving him fixed and in a trance.

By The oil lamp's reddish-glow,
Her strange complexion to bestow.
Both their eyes then to meet;
Causing his heart...to then...retreat!

The struggle now-was in his soul:
Whether love?...Or repulsion to take control?
Both...drawn...to her lovely face to spy;
And repulsed...by each desiring, craving eye.

The mother then placed the bowl with haste.
The toddy, the young boy then to taste.
She then tasted...and to then refrain;
(He thinking) "The drink" ...now affecting his brain?

Intensely...her hair, he spied.
Her forehead only, to be its guide.
Her hair so beautifully shown;
Smoothed...itself...back, on its own.

Then came...the shuddering..of his soul;
As her lower jaw...projected...toward the bowl.
Her dazzling teeth (in the light) to shine.
The sight to soon vanish...and the young man...to opine.

The young woman gave her mother the bowl;
As he gazed...with vexation in his soul!
Then she rose...and quickly..left their sight,
Out of the cottage...and into...the night.

---Gleaming Eyes & Shining Teeth---(Poem 5)

The old woman pointed to a heather bed;
As the place for the night to lay his head.
Weary...the young man, from this day
Wrapped himself in his cloak...to hit the hay.

The moment his head to lay,
A fresh storm was now underway.
The wind blew through the cracks of the hut;
His cloak over his head, (for the noise to rebut).

Unable to sleep, he listened away;
As the window held back...the sea and the spray.
The door opened...the young woman came in;
Curled...up on the bench...with her hand on her chin.

(In that same strange posture as before)
Her face turned towards the young man...all the more.
If he moved...she would drop her head.
Yet still she quietly...keenly...peering...towards his bed.

The mother soon...to disappear.
Drowsiness...and soon sleep...was drawing near.

A move...from the bench..the boy to excite!
Thinking..."A four-footed creature?" was drowsily in sight.

Hazily...dreaming...a large dog...to trot across the floor?
Then with stealth to quietly exit the door.
In the darkness...he felt...a rising dread!
The fixed gaze of two eyes now upon his bed

He stared...at the fire, then was soon aware
The bench was vacant, and the young woman, no longer

there
Wondering..."What reason to enter a storm so deep?"
Soon reposing...the young man fell fast asleep.

In the depth of that stormy night,
Awakened in pain at what was now in his sight!
A deep ache in his shoulder to be!
With gleaming eyes...and shining teeth...to now...see!

---The Howling and the Weeping---(Poem 6)

Suddenly, he woke with his shoulder in pangs!
By a creature, with its embedded fangs!
Pulsating...was he now in throbbing pain.
His strength and mind? He could not regain.

The young man with...one hand to resist!
With the other hand...and knife..to assist.
Flailing...he struggled...in vain!

Futilely stabbing...again...and again!

The creature....snuffed...and snorted,
With its wild body contorted.
They fought...and rolled....around,
Across the cottage...and to...the ground.

As the creature leapt and rolled,
From his neck now loosening it hold.
Soon releasing a H-O-W-L! and a S-C-R-E-A-M!
The mixture so...strange and...so...extreme.

The creature darted across the floor.
Sea and spray spread across the floor.
With the spray...and mist...upon his face,
He sprang to his feet and began the chase.

It was dark...and a wild and stormy night,
With crashing waves...of flashing white.
During this raining, stormy scare,
A gruesome sound..then...filled the air.

From the dark, there came a g-r-o-w-l,
Then a rising mixture of weep and H-O-W-L!
He turned back...where he was before,
To enter the cottage...and to close the door.

The lamp's flicker was soon to quench,
(Not certain of a woman who might be upon the bench)
The student...overcome with sudden fear

Then seeing...that there...was no one...here.

The aftershock...would not abate.
So for daylight, the student...sat...to wait.
The morning...was dim, gusty...and gray;
And out the door, did he make his way.

He wandered the beach in the morning light.
(Considering all that had happened that dreadful night)
Along the beach, still..r-i-n-g-i-n-g....in his ear;
The h-o-w-l-i-n-g...and the weeping...that night...to hear.

---The She-Wolf---(Poem 7)

As the student walked in morning light,
The small cottage was again in sight.
In the distance, he heard his name;
From the cottage, the voice of the old woman came.

"Sir! The weather will be broken all the day."
"Your friends will soon depart! To them...make your way!"
(Before he could offer the old woman reply)
The face...of the young girl...soon...caught his eye.

Confused in mind, did he hesitate.
(The girl's....beseeking....glance...to communicate)
A flash-of-wrath upon the old woman's face,
Raising her arm...at her daughter's disgrace.

To punish the daughter...was her aim,

As the young girl stooped her head in shame.
He...quickly...darted to intervene,
To shield the girl...to step between.

As the old woman sought to end this quell,
The scarf around her daughter's neck...then...fell.
The young man then to soon detect,
Five...deep...bruises upon the daughter's neck.

A cry of horror was the girl's lament!
Then out the door the young girl went.
As he...bounded..for the door.
(Nothing prepared him for what was in store)

What he beheld..left him...in terror and fright!
A huge...gray...wolf was now in sight!
The gray wolf to lung his way!
The young man...was now...to be her prey.

---Her Final Cry---(Poem 8)

He had no weapon in his hand.
His regard for the girl was not in command.
Chivalry...no longer...had its place,
As he...was riveted...to the gray...wolf's...face.

He stood his ground and set his feet.
Thinking..."The wolf a fight to meet!
She sprung at him expecting her rage
Preparing a fight to the death to engage!

Expecting fangs to pierce him deep
But...on his chest? There..was a woman...to weep.
Thinking..."She would devour him peck-by-peck."
Yet...she was weeping...with arms...around his neck.

Then...something...unexplainable, strange!
The woman...in an instant..into a wolf...to change!
From the young man it broke away
He followed her...without delay.

The gray wolf...in stride..to higher ground.
Up a cliff....H-O-W-L-I-N-G!...where she was found
(Was he drawn by pity? Dare say...by love?)
As he made his way...to the moor...above.

As he reached the level place of stones,
Faintly...hearing...the sound...of crunching bones.
Hungry devouring was not the sound
But s-n-a-r-l-i-n-g....anger...as the bones were ground.

There again...he stood...at the mouth...of the cave.
In the shadows of its darkened nave,
Was her g-r-o-w-l-i-n-g...her g-r-i-n-d-i-n-g...and her C-R-I-E-S!
(Not knowing if the wolf would be his demise)

The student was torn...by desire...and dread.
He...not wanting to be left there for dead
He stepped away from this place of bones

Still hearing her C-R-I-E-S!....her W-A-I-L-S...her M-O-A-N-S!

Across the moor...without delay,
Then looking back...as he made his way.
At the edge...of the cliff...did he see,
Against the sky...a sight to be!

The girl....staring....gazing...with tearful eyes,
Against the gray...and cloudy skies'
At the edge of the cliff, wringing her hand-to-hand.
In that distant gaze, they both....did stand

No solace...or consolation...to assail
As the woman offered her final W-A-A-A-I-I-L-L-L!
No making....no attempt to follow,
Her fate was sealed...her heart was hollow.

He found his group there on the shore.
Reunited...yet...her face...to see no more.
On the boat returning against winds and the gales,
He could faintly hear...her CRIES and W-A-A-A-I-I-L-L-LS!